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**Ventura Fire Department recognizes firefighters and employees  
at its annual awards ceremony**

**Ventura, Calif.** – The Ventura Fire Department and Ventura Fire Foundation recognized the outstanding achievements of six firefighters and two public employees at its annual awards ceremony held at the Crowne Plaza on April 21, 2023.

“Each individual recognized at this event embodies care, compassion, and a steadfast commitment to serving our community,” stated Fire Chief David Endaya. “Our city is enriched by its exceptional firefighters and staff who go above and beyond to enhance public safety at the local level. The individuals being honored have demonstrated an outstanding level of dedication in providing high-quality service to those in need.”

Captain Austin Araiza received the Firefighter of the Year award for consistently going beyond the call of duty to ensure arson investigations are complete and timely, the best personal protective gear is used correctly, and new team members receive comprehensive training.

Engineer Zach Benner was awarded the Paramedic of the Year honor for providing high-quality care to those in need and serving as an exemplary leader among his peers.

The Greg Andrews Safety Award, recognizing a continued commitment to ensuring a safer workplace for all, was presented to Captain Christopher Pironti. Pironti has unselfishly served Ventura for over ten years and has been an active leader within the Peer Support Team, providing quality information and resources to employees.

Luis Martinez was recognized as the Fire Prevention Employee of the Year. “Luis is always willing to lend a hand and is dedicated to providing top-notch customer service,” said Fire Marshal Brett Reed. “Luis takes pride in producing quality work and continually positively represents the City.”

This year, a new award was created to honor fallen Firefighter-Paramedic Matthew Clapsaddle, who unexpectedly passed away on August 20, 2022. The Matthew Clapsaddle Career Achievement Award was presented to Firefighter-Paramedic Ryan Howard for providing incredible support to the Clapsaddle family immediately following Matt’s passing. He is a treasured member of the Peer Support Team, and his caring demeanor inspires action.

Finally, much like large structure fires requiring additional personnel to respond, the 3rd Alarm Award honors those employees who have gone above and beyond the initial call of duty, providing invaluable support to the Department. Captain Shawn Hughes, Captain Kyle Tong, and Administrative Assistant Kris Edwards were honored with this award.

At the ceremony, service awards and recent retirements were also commemorated.

For more information about the Ventura Fire Department, visit [www.VenturaCityFire.com](http://www.VenturaCityFire.com).

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